
REASON OF INTEGRATION OF ELITE SPORT ORGANIZATIONS INTO FIRMS: A CASE OF JAPANESE CORPORATE SPORT CLUBS

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Abstract

Kayoko Fukushi is a bronze medalist of women's marathon in 2013 IAAF World Championships. She is not a professional runner but one of Japanese employee in Wacoal, a manufacturer of textile goods. She works in a Project Planning Department until 14:00 and then starts training on weekdays. Although the medalist was not a world-class runner when she was a high-school student, she crowned her career with the support by the company. The company owns a team for distance running which comprises more than 10 employees-athletes, coaches, trainers and dieticians. This type of sport organizations is very popular in Japan and is called a "corporate sport club".

Japanese socio-cultural and economic environment are related to the existence of this type of sport organizations. Concept of employee benefit management is widely diffused in Japanese firms and the firms provide recreational activities such as sports meets with employees for employee retention (Yamamoto, 2011). On the other hand, as Ahmadjian and Robinson (2001) suggested, recent economic recession has made it difficult to maintain the integration of elite sport organization in private firms. Therefore, not all corporate sport clubs who currently survive are situated in the same manner as before. How are corporate sport clubs still integrated into firms?

The purpose of this research is to understand current situation of corporate sports clubs in Japan by looking at two corporate sport clubs both of which are not in a traditional Japanese company: (1) a club in the firm which does not provide long-term contract or seniority-based payment, (2) another club in the firm which was influenced by foreign investors who do not always hope to own sport clubs. The case study shows not only environmental conditions but also behaviors to give the sport organizations meaning are important for survival of corporate sport clubs.

To approach the above question, it seems to be useful to rely on two

academic discussions. First one is the knowledge about relationship between sport organizations and their environments. According to Slack and Parent (2005), sport organizations have two types of environments: a general environment and a task environment. The general environment includes those sectors that can influence the industry in general ways that ultimately have an impact on the organization. The task environment is made up of some aspects of the general environment that can have impacts on the sport organizations' ability to achieve their goals. Many sport management researchers pointed out the relation between environments and organizational structure (Slack and Hinings, 1992; Kikulis, et al., 1992). However, there is no empirical research about Japanese corporate sport clubs and no explanation why elite sport organizations are integrated into private firms.

Second one is what is called Japanese studies in management researches. Whether Japanese institutional practices such as seniority-based payments and lifetime employment will be kept or not has been a hot issue in this area (.Ahmadjian and Robinson , 2001; Ahmadjian and Robinson , 2005; Jackson, 2009; Aoki et. al, 2012). On the one hand, it is mentioned that the institutional practices are vanished. In fact, according to Sports Research and Planning Institute of Japan (2013), more than three hundred clubs were vanished since some firms regarded them as wasteful after 1990s.

On the other hand, some researcher claimed that they would be survived. One of key concepts for the survival is the actors who engage in finding a new interpretation of mixed situation of new and old practices. Therefore, to approach the above-mentioned question, it is important to understand how the actors (1) acknowledge general and task environments, and (2) interpret new and old institutional practices. Then, Jackson (2009)'s suggestion is used to select appropriate cases which include the mixed situation: (1) a firm which weakened only lifetime employment, (2) a firm which weakened only cross-shareholdings to intensify corporate governance.

The author conducted case analysis from each category. Data was collected with (1) interviews with club coaches and the corporate executives through whom the clubs were overseen, (2) archival sources. Data is analyzed using standard protocols for constant comparisons (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although analysis have not completed yet, the evidence that not only environmental conditions but also behaviors to give the sport organizations meaning are important for survival of corporate sport clubs would be reported in the presentation.

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